

pulled her blistering hands back to rub them on the soft warmth of her sweat shirt.

The ladies didn't arrive home until the pink dawn was brightening the eastern sky. They went their separate ways for some much needed sleep, with Juanita promising to give Ruth a call when she woke up. "We'll get together and figure out what to do with her," she said, pointing at the bag in Ruth's hand. Ruth said O.K., that they'd come up with a game plan over coffee and carry it out later in the afternoon. They'd forgotten about their husbands' Saturday morning bowling league.

Ellis stuck his hand in the bag (thumb in the mouth, middle fingers jammed into the eyes) pulled her out and fired without looking. "She's rollin' a little funny," Clete observed from his seat on the fiberglass bench where he was pulling on his rental shoes. "Yeah," said Ellis, watching her bounce and skip down the alley. But she hit the pocket for a strike, and Ellis shot his fist in the air and said, "Yeah!" his concern vanishing with the thunderclap of the scattering pins.

But his concern returned when Mom did: she rolled up the ball return sporting a ghastly grin that scared Clete into a dead faint and sat Ellis down on the cold floor clutching at his chest.

RUTH AND ELLIS CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS

"Take the damned camera away from the kid, would ya? Film's four-fifty a roll," Ellis shouted to his wife Ruth. "For cryin' out loud, I was savin' that roll for Xmas pictures to send out with the X-Mas cards."

Little Roy had — arm over his head for a blind grope on top of the dining room table — found the camera and clicked away: snapshots of his feet, the bottom half of the lamp, the picnic table, the toolshed....

Ruth said, "You'll just have to buy another roll; he shot the whole thing up," as she opened the camera and removed the film.

Ellis had it developed, two prints each, and he mailed them with the cards, labelled on the backs, just in case the recipients couldn't tell what they were.

And when Ruth found out — in that week between Xmas and New Years — there was hell to pay.